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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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1. Mideast
2. IsraelQs Nuclear Policy

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Key stories in the media:  
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Israel Radio reported that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton testified yesterday to a U.S. congressional committee that the U.S. wants to see a quick resumption of peace talks between Israel and

the Palestinians. Clinton reportedly said that U.S. Special Envoy to Middle East Peace Senator George Mitchell is attempting to make headways in that direction, but she did not name a date for the resumption of the negotiations.

Yediot quoted the Secretary of State as saying yesterday at a Senate committee that sanctions on Iran will soon be applied. Clinton also affirmed that progress has been made in convincing China to join the sanctions. However, the daily quoted a senior Russian Foreign Ministry official as saying that his country will strenuously oppose strong sanctions. Yediot reported that DM Ehud Barak met with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at U.N. Headquarters in New York yesterday. Barak was quoted as saying that nuclear weapons in Iran would change the entire strategic balance in the region and that sanctions defined in time have to be imposed on Iran. Ban was quoted as saying that he agrees that Iran must be prevented from reaching nuclear capability and that he will do his utmost to push sanctions forward. Israel Radio reported that Ban expressed his concern to Barak about the siege on Gaza, IAF overflights of Lebanon, and the Israeli decision to proclaim the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb heritage sites.

Israel Radio also quoted Clinton as saying at her Senate testimony that the Obama administration's decision to send an American ambassador to Syria after a five-year absence does not mean that U.S. concerns about the country have been addressed.

The Jerusalem Post reported that today's bilateral strategic talks between the U.S. and Israel are expected to focus on sanctions against Iran, a day after Russia announced it opposes paralyzing sanctions aimed at the Islamic Republic's energy sector. A possible military strike is not expected to be discussed, since Washington has made clear that while it might need to be discussed in the future, the military option is not now on the agenda. There is currently no known discussion between Israel and the U.S., at any level, about military action, even though over the years both countries have said that it should not be taken off the table. The meeting comes as both Jerusalem and Washington believe that Iran is making its international position more difficult by continuing to talk about enriching uranium to higher levels. While it is unclear exactly which way China will vote on sanctions, there is a growing sense that it would be unlikely to buck the will of most of the rest of the world -- and the other permanent members of the Security Council -- and scuttle sanctions. This assessment is largely based on previous Chinese behavior and Beijing's general reticence to defy international consensus. The Jerusalem Post reported that in the run-up to the Security Council sanctions vote, expected sometime in March, the U.S. is doing its utmost to distance itself from any hint that sanctions were intended for regime change in Teheran, and not only to stop the nuclear program. The fear is that this could chase both Russia and China away from supporting a fourth round of sanctions.

The Jerusalem Post printed a Letter to the Editor by Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Michael H. Posner, who rebuts claims made by the newspaper's columnist Anne Bayefsky on 2/17 that his intervention at the U.N. Human Rights Council as part of the Universal Periodic Review concerning human rights in Iran was minimal. Posner responds that he had clearly condemned the unjust suppression of Iranian citizens and that he had expressed the United States' concern about the status of detainees in Iran, torture, and the systematic violations by the Iranian government of religious freedom.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday top EU officials threw their support behind the Goldstone Report, two days before the U.N. General Assembly debates it.

The aftermath of the Dubai assassination continued to dominate Israeli media headlines, which quoted the Emirate's police chief as saying yesterday that 15 additional Mossad agents took part in the hit. At least 10 of them carried passports under the names of actual Israeli residents. Israel Radio reported that Israel's Ambassador to Australia Yuval Rotem was called in for clarifications by the Foreign Ministry in Canberra, as Australian FM Stephen Francis Smith said that three Australian passports had been forged in the operation. Israel Radio reported that Smith told Rotem that if it turns out that Israel carried out the assassination, the

Australian Government would not view this as an act by a friendly nation. The radio also cited the concern of Australian PM Kevin Michael Rudd, a Qgreat friend of Israel,Q over the issue. Maariv reported that Dubai police exposed details about 17 MasterCard credit cards used in the hit: they were allegedly linked to a single U.S. bank Q Metabank from Stormlake, Iowa. Dubai police said that the cards were also connected to another American bank -- Pioneer Bank in New York. One of PioneerQs key clients is Birthright Israel (Taglit), a project offering young Jews free trips to get to know Israel. Media reported that two of the assassins might have fled to Iran. Some media questioned the large number of foreigners -- 26 --suspected by Dubai: a commentary in Israel Hayom by former Mossad official Rami Igra is headlined: QReality or Fantasy?Q Yediot noted that around one quarter of the agents who acted in Dubai were women -- an Qadvantage well-known to Israel.Q The Shas party newspaper Yom Leyom quoted Israeli defense sources as saying that IsraelQs deterrence has strengthened following reports about al-MabhouhQs assassination.

Israel Radio reported that yesterday the State Department criticized the Israeli GovernmentQs naming of two biblical shrines as national heritage sites to be preserved. The media reported that clashes over the issue between Palestinians and Israeli security forces continued yesterday. IDF Radio quoted President Shimon Peres as saying that Israel is not interested in an artificial confrontation. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that yesterday, during a QLatin American conferenceQ in Jerusalem, Information and Diaspora Affairs Minister Yuli Edelstein (Likud) hinted that the Palestinians are attempting to change history and IsraelQs heritage.

Israel Radio and other media reported that Lebanese authorities have arrested an additional Lebanese man suspected of spying for Israel.

Israel Hayom and Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that a building company has filed a 171-million shekel (around \$45 million) compensation suit over PM NetanyahuQs moratorium on settlement construction.

HaQaretz quoted U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates as saying at a recent NATO meeting that EuropeQs conciliatory attitude is preventing the establishment of world peace. Maariv quoted Kadima Knesset Member Shaul Mofaz as saying yesterday during a meeting of the partyQs Knesset faction that he does not intend to split the party, whose leadership he said he would now be seeking. Mofaz had threatened to break up the party if primaries were not held.

Maariv quoted senior academics as saying that the Government will not tell them what to teach. (Yesterday Maariv reported on a planned Education Ministry program to require all university and college students to take a compulsory course in the Qheritage of the Jewish people and the Zionist project.Q)

Maariv described the assassination in Damascus two years ago of senior Hizbullah agent Imad Mughniyah, as told by Gordon Thomas, a correspondent for the British newspaper The Independent. Thomas says that the hit was originally ordered by former PM Ariel Sharon, later approved by Ehud Olmert, and carried out by the Mossad.

All media reported that testimony in former PM Ehud OlmertQs trial on a variety of corruption charges starts today.

HaQaretz reported cited the Russian news agency Interfax as saying that a Kazakh court has sentenced Dr. Boris Sheinkman, a businessman representing Israeli defense companies, to 11 yearsQ imprisonment for allegedly giving bribes to senior Kazakh officials.

The subject of Dr. Sheinkman was not scheduled to be discussed by the two leaders. However, after discussions on the matter last night President Peres decided to raise the sensitive subject. Dr. Sheinkman was arrested several months ago as part of a bribery affair that caused a storm in Kazakhstan and among the Israeli defense industry working in Muslim countries.

Maariv reported that next week Israeli Arab youngsters will join a flight course for outstanding students.

Media reported on a test run of JerusalemQs light railway yesterday.

This means of transportation is expected to be operational by April 2011. The media also reported that the Government approved the national transportation plan devised by Netanyahu and Transportation Minister and Road Safety Yisrael Katz (Likud). The first stage of the project will cost 27.5 billion shekels (around \$7.29 billion). One of the reported projects is the restoration of the historical QValley RailwayQ linking Akko (Acre) and the Jezreel Valley through Karmiel.

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1. Mideast:  
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Block Quotes:  
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#### I. QNot Combat Heritage

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/25): QThe cabinet's decision to extensively alter important sites in the West Bank clearly violates the commitment to refrain from changing the status quo in the territories, whose fate is subject to negotiations. If there is an urgent need for maintenance work at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, it would have been suitable to discuss this first with the PA's leaders and to coordinate plans with the Islamic institution that handles the site where both Jews and Muslims worship, rather than arrogantly asserting ownership. Anyone who declares holy places in Hebron and Bethlehem to be Israeli heritage sites should not be surprised when right-wing activists seize a synagogue in Jericho. This is what happens under a government that has made acting belligerently toward its neighbors a strategy and provoking the world a policy. Netanyahu must not turn Jewish heritage sites into a new chapter in Israel's long combat heritage. He should announce that joint restoration work at Rachel's Tomb and the Tomb of the Patriarchs will be one of the first subjects of peace talks with the Palestinians.

#### II. QNetanyahu's Vision

Senior commentator Ari Shavit wrote in Ha'aretz (2/25): QFinally there is a vision. Speaking to HaQaretz earlier this week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defined for the first time his vision of the future: Israel as a global technology leader, grounded in its values and moving toward peace from a position of power. You can like the vision or hate it, accept it or reject it, but now it is clear what Netanyahu is proposing against Peace Now of the Left, and how he is dividing those in the center. His overall goal is now apparent.... At the celebratory cabinet meeting in Tel Hai [a symbolic place of Jewish heroism] this week, his government adopted a program for restoring and reinforcing national heritage. Once again, the decision was derided and ridiculed. Secular France invests greatly in commemorating its cultural and national heritage, while democratic United States glorifies its past and speaks incessantly about its uniqueness and greatness, and yet this is forbidden for Israel.... The unbridled assault on the plan, therefore, is not an attack on the Right and the occupation. It is an attack on the values that have shaped and defined us -- an attack on Israel's core identity.... Netanyahu is doing something important in trying to revive Zionism, but without confronting the occupation his effort will fail. If Israel is to be a global technological leader, grounded in its values and moving toward peace from a position of power, it must gradually leave the territories. The Prime Minister deserves a good word this week, but he must know that only if he removes Israel from [the radical settlements of] Yitzhar and Itamar will he have the strength to restore it to what was promised at [the communities of] Ruhama, Kinneret, Hulda, and Rosh Pina [within the Green Line].

#### III. QThe Winds of Middle East War

Columnist Michael Freund, who was an assistant to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his first term in office, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/25): QFrom Beirut and Damascus in the north to Tehran in the east, and back to Gaza in the south, the Qarc of hateQ surrounding the Jewish state is speaking openly and brazenly of conflict and destruction. Israel's foes have launched increasingly fiery verbal volleys in recent weeks, in what

appears to be a coordinated campaign to heighten tensions in the region. With pressure mounting on Iran over its nuclear program, and the threat of stricter sanctions in the air, Israel needs to be on guard and alert.... Indeed, on January 31, U.S. National Security Advisor James Jones warned that Iran might very well choose to lash out at Israel in the coming months.... It is therefore essential that international pressure be brought to bear on Damascus and Teheran to cease and desist from driving the region toward greater instability.

#### IV. QEverything but PR

Peace Now Secretary-General Yariv Oppenheimer wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/25): QOver recent days the Information and Diaspora Affairs Minister. A government Web site that Qtells citizens what to think and tell, and how to look at reality,Q belongs to fascistic and sinister states. Moreover, adopting those positions and attempting to market to market them will only harm Israel and its status in the world. Inaccuracies, the selective and tendentious choice made in the presentation of the Israeli-Arab conflict can only increase dislike of Israel and its policy. Phony Qpublic relationsQ tainted by racism will cause harm and deepen even further the rift between Israeli society and the Western world.

#### V. QBest Movie

Liberal contributor Einat Weizman wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/25): QIf Israeli agents did in fact carry out the liquidation [of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh], their goal was achieved and Mabhouh is no longer alive, but a film [disseminated on You Tube about the assassination exemplifies the distortion of IsraelQs perception of its place in the Middle East. It seems that its failure lies, among other causes, in arrogance and misunderstanding of reality. Antiquated terror techniques that worked well in the past can no longer function in a sophisticated media environment. Thus, while the Dubai authorities demonstrated perfect understanding of the communications age, the assassins whom those authorities so skillfully documented look like a gang of clumsy killers from a past era. In fact, [Ehud BarakQs] characterization of Israel as a villa in the jungle should be reversed to Qa jungle in a villa.

#### VI. QWho Needs Ancient Caves, We Have iPhones

Conservative columnist Haim Navon wrote in Maariv (2/25): QNetanyahuQs [choice of heritage sites] has caused great turmoil among the Palestinians. One can easily understand why. They attempt to present themselves as natives and themselves as a people under occupation; the unearthing of 4,000-year-old Jewish sites slightly shakes the fantasy called the QPalestinian narrative.Q Why anger the Palestinians in the name of dubious principles?

#### VII. QFantastical Adventures

Intelligence affairs correspondent Yossi Melman wrote in Ha'aretz (2/25): QThere is no doubt that more than a little of the information that [DubaiQs chief of police] is disclosing or leaking to the media is part of a ploy in which bits of disinformation are planted. He's throwing out a lure in the hope that someone in Israel will swallow the bait and respond by incriminating himself or disclosing confidential information.... It is hard to believe that, if the Mossad intelligence agency carried out the operation, the planners were so irresponsible as to dispatch nearly 30 agents and to expose an entire select operational unit on one assassination operation. This is true even if we assume the planner thought the target should be hit no matter what, and even if hypothetically Mabhouh was on his way to Iran to arrange an arms deal that Israel had seen as changing the balance of power. Either the new revelations are another salvo in Dubai's psychological warfare or the police investigators are groping in the dark. It is doubtful we will ever know the truth. The evidence linking Israel to the affair is still weak, certainly for courtroom purposes but also in the diplomatic sphere. But the saga also sends a message of deterrence to Hamas that the long arm of whoever carried out the operation can hit another senior Hamas official.

#### VIII. QPinpointed Assassination

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Lord wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (2/25): QWhen Israel is suspected of eliminating a senior terror figure -- not from the air but in a pinpoint fashion Qno investigator in the world will refuse to probe the Qmurder,Q as if it were a great loss to mankind, like Albert Schweitzer or Mother Theresa. In the final analysis, international responses stem from the basic conception that Israel is the only body in the world that is required to justify the land it sits on and the citizens of which must present a report to justify the quantity of oxygen they consume.

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12. Israel's Nuclear Policy:  
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Block Quotes:  
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QWhat if We Wouldn't Scare Ourselves with the Bomb?

Avner Cohen, author of the book QIsrael and the BombQ and a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, wrote in HaQaretz (2/25): QUltimately, we need to internalize the insight that even Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad voiced this week, when he said that all the talk about an Iranian bomb is irrational and meaningless. This is not simply because any Iranian attempt to destroy Israel via a nuclear bomb would kill countless Palestinians, but because it would surely lead to the destruction of Iran itself by Israel and the United States. Therefore, the idiotic claim that Iran could bring about Israel's destruction does not hold water. While it is true that Ahmadinejad would love Israel to implode of its own accord, a self-confident and strong nation should not take such statements too seriously. And it certainly should not view them as an existential threat.

CUNNINGHAM